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ABSTRACT

Some researchers argue that males and females develop moral reasoning in the same manner, while others contend that males tend toward moral judgements based on the concept of "Justice" and women base their judgements on "Care." A third school argues that neither such cognitive elements as justice and care are as important as emotion, particularly empathy, in moral action. A study was conducted to determine whether there were any gender differences in children's moral orientation to political conflict and to examine the relationship between empathy and moral orientation. The study involved 30 males and 31 females from grades K, 2, 4, and 6 at an urban magnet school in Massachusetts. The children were interviewed about their understanding of events in the war in the Persian Gulf, their feelings toward the war, and their sources of information. Responses were coded to identify moral considerations as justice- or care-oriented, and then were reviewed for expressions of empathy. Study findings included the following: (1) among children in kindergarten through second grade, 38% showed neither "Care" nor "Justice" orientations and 2% included both; (2) among children in grades 4 through 6, 5% showed no orientation and 20% showed both; (3) for all children, no significant differences in moral orientation were found for males and females; (4) for the 35 children whose responses included moral considerations, only one child showed a "Justice" orientation, while 11 children showed "Care" orientations; and (5) the only gender differences found were with respect to empathy, with 17 females making empathetic statements compared to 5 males. (AC)

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MORAL ORIENTATION AND EXPRESSIONS OF EMPATHY IN CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS OF THE PERSIAN GULF CONFLICT

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Introduction

The general aim of this project was to investigate children's perspectives on the events surrounding the Persian Gulf war. Specifically, we were interested in children's understanding of political conflict as an avenue for studying moral development and perspective taking.

A long standing debate in the field of moral development is whether there are two gender-related modes of moral reasoning. Lawrence Kohlberg (1958, 1981), and other researchers since, have maintained that moral reasoning in males and females can be described by a single model of development. According to Kohlberg, advanced stages in moral reasoning are characterized by a set of abstract moral principles based on justice, equity, and equality. In contrast, Carol Gilligan (1982) has argued that males and females in our society have different orientations to moral conflict. According to Gilligan, males typically take a Justice orientation towards conflict. That is, males emphasize the importance of rights, justice, and obligations in their construals and resolutions of conflicts. Females, on the other hand, typically, have a Care orientation which emphasizes the importance of human relations and the welfare and well being of all parties involved. Gilligan's position stresses that. while males and

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females are capable of taking both perspectives, and sometimes do, in general one perspective or orientation predominates. There is some empirical evidence (for instance, Gilligan and Attanuccii, 1988) that at least by young adolescents these two moral orientations are distinct and gender-related. An open question is whether young children also exhibit gender-related moral orientations. Kohlberg's theory essentially predicts no gender differences. Gilligan's theory, on the other hand, predicts that there would be gender differences in children --since she argues that the origins of the Care orientation and the Justice orientation are found in the different experiences males and females encounter ~~childhood~~ in establishing relationships with others. One aim of the present study is to determine if there are gender differences in young children's moral reasoning about political conflict.

A second related issue is the relationship of emotions to moral reasoning and moral action. The two paradigms discussed previously (Gilligan and Kohlberg) prioritize the role of cognition in the construal and resolution of moral dilemmas. Some researchers such as Martin Hoffman (1991) have argued that moral action, while guided by moral reasoning, is motivated by emotion. In particular, he argues that empathy plays a central role in moral action if only indirectly through the initial establishment of moral orientations. The relationship Hoffman draws between Empathy and the Care orientation is straightforward: If one empathizes with another they will feel "connected" with the other and act to relieve the other's pain, sorrow, etc.. Less clear is the preported relationship

between Empathy and the Justice orientation. Hoffman argues that principles of justice (such as equality, equity and need) are fundamentally linked with the ability to Empathize with other people's situations. To take just one example, Hoffman describes equity as a principe which states that "people should be rewarded for how much they produce or according to how much effort they expand". Hoffman argues that Empathy is implicitly involved in recognizing the effort and sacrifice related to hard work or the disappointment that is felt if compensation for one's labor is not forthcoming. The relations Hoffman describes between principles of Justice and Empathy, in our opinion are quite abstract and seem removed from moral decision making. So, on theoretical grounds, we question the role of Empathy in the Justice orientation and hold that Empathy would be more central to the Care orientation than the Justice orientation. In the present study we attempt to look at this issue empirically and try determine whether there is any relationship between Empathy and Moral orientation in our subject's accounts of the Gulf conflict. If Hoffman's theory is accurate Empathy should be exhibited by any child who has a moral orientation regardless of whether it is a Justice or Care orientation.

To summarize, the aims of this study are twofold. First, we set out to determine if there are gender differences in children's moral orientation to political conflict. Secondly, we wanted to determine if there is a relationship between empathy and moral orientation.

Subjects and Procedures

I turn now to the study itself. In Table 1 we provide information on the subject pool. There were 61 children from an urban magnet school in massachusetts who participated, roughly an equal amount of boys and girls. The children were from four grades (k, 2, 4, 6). Two classrooms from each grade were involved.

Subjects: N = 61

	GRADE K	2	4	6	
MALE	9	9	4	8	30
FEMALE	5	10	6	10	31
	14	19	10	18	

The interviews about the Persian Gulf War were semi-structured. Each interviewer asked the same standard questions and then followed up with questions suitable to children's responses. Questions were asked in three main areas.

A. Understanding of Events: Can you tell me what you know about the war? What happened? Why do you think we went to war?

B. Feelings towards the war: How do you feel about the war?

C. Information Sources: Do you ever talk to your (parents/ teachers/friends) about the war? What did you talk about? Did you watch it on TV?

After each question, a series of probe questions were given to encourage the child to speak as much as possible. On average the interviews lasted 15 minutes after which the children were asked to

draw a picture about the war and describe it. We did not include the pictures, themselves, in the present analysis but we did include children's discussions of the pictures --since often this provided an opportunity for shy children to discuss their views outside of the Q & A format.

Coding

The coding procedures are straight forward. We relied on the coding scheme provided by Nona Lyons (1982) in her dissertation. For each transcript we identified moral considerations that the child had and classified them as either Care considerations or Justice consideration. Care considerations express concerns for the needs, wants and the welfare of others.

(eg. "He wouldn't be able to fight with anyone and no more people would be getting hurt.")

Justice considerations express concerns of fairness, rights and obligations.

(eg. "It was wrong for Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait like that. He attacked Kuwait so we had to go over and defend Kuwait.)

After each transcript was coded for these two types of considerations we classified each subject into one of four possible groups: NO CODABLE ORIENTATION, CARE ONLY, JUSTICE ONLY, CARE AND JUSTICE.

One important difference between our classification system and Lyon's (1982) system should be noted. Lyon's procedures were developed for adult's narratives which often include a high

frequency of moral considerations. In Lyon's coding scheme, a person is classified as having a Justice orientation if more than 75% of the moral considerations were justice based. Likewise a Care Orientation is indicated if the majority of moral considerations are care based. In our own data, children usually provided only per or three moral considerations during the course of the interview. If for a given child all his/her moral considerations were care based then they were classified as having a Care orientation. Similar procedures were used for determining a Justice orientation. Unfortunately, for children who had both Care and Justice concerns in their narratives we were unable to determine whether one orientation predominated over the other. Hence, children who fell into this category were simply labelled as having both a Care and Justice orientation.

Next, we coded for expressions of Empathy. For the purposes of our study, we tacitly defined "Empathy" as the ability to recognize and share the feelings of other people. We tallied any Expressions of empathetic sadness, anger or joy in the transcripts.

(eg. "Its like sad because so many people are dying. They cannot go back to their homes . They don't have their families with them.")

It is important to point out that both theoretically and technically, Empathetic statements are distinct from Care considerations. An Empathetic statement indicates that the child feels fear, sadness or happiness for another person. A Care consideration, on the other hand, is an explicit justification for action. In other words, empathetic statements indicate a shared

emotion, whereas Care considerations indicate a type of moral judgement.

Results and Discussion

First I would like to briefly report on our findings regarding grade differences. Table 2 shows the results regarding grade and moral orientation.

Table 2: GRADE and MORAL ORIENTATION $x^2 = 25.21$ N = 61

	No Orient.	(Care or Justice)	(Care and Justice)	
4 & 6	.05	.20	.20	.45
K & 2	.38	.16	.02	.56
	.43	.36	.22	

In the table we see that 43% of the children (mainly from Kindergarten and grade 2) did not have an identifiable orientation. This means these children did not provide any kind of justification for actions --for instance, reasons why the US was involved. It is also interesting to note that 22% of the children (mostly from grades 4 & 6) included both Care and Justice statements in their narratives suggesting that they were able to take both orientations towards the events. It appears that as children get older they are able to view the events from a dual perspectives --a finding in accord with broader cognitive developmental theories which attribute greater perspective taking skills to older children. For the remainder of the analysis we collapse the grades.

Turning now to our first question about whether there are gender differences in moral reasoning among children, we see in

Table 3 that male and female children did not significantly differ from one another in terms of the whether they had no orientation, a Care orientation, a Justice orientation or both a Care and Justice orientation. This finding is interesting. It suggests, contra Gilligan, that both female and male children alike are able to take these moral orientations. In other words, moral orientations do not appear to be gender-related in the grammar school years.

Table 3: **GENDER and MORAL ORIENTATION** x^2 = ns N = 61

	No Orient.	Care	Justice	(Care and Justice)
MALE	.25	.07	.08	.10
FEMALE	.18	.07	.15	.11

Potential reasons for this finding will be discussed shortly but first we will consider the results regarding our second research question --How does Empathy relate to the Care and Justice orientation? In this analysis, we considered only those children who provided moral considerations in their narratives (35 in all) e.g., all of those children who could be categorized as having a Justice orientation or a Care orientation or both. Looking at table 4, we find an interesting interaction between Empathy and moral orientation. Only one child who had a Justice orientation included an empathetic statement in their narrative. In contrast 11 children with Care orientations had empathetic statements. If a child had a Justice orientation they tended not to include empathetic

statements. This suggests that Hoffman may have overstated the relationship between Empathy and the Justice orientation: it seems that outward expressions of empathy are more central to a Care orientation than a Justice orientation.

Table 4: **MORAL ORIENTATION and EMPATHY** $x^2 = 8.887$ $p < .01$

n = 35

	+ Empathy	- Empathy	
CARE	11	9	20
JUSTICE	1	14	15
	12	23	

Given this finding, an important question is whether there are gender differences with regard to Empathy. Indeed, in Table 5 shows that, on the whole, females provided more empathetic statements than males. For instance, only 5 males provided empathetic statements. In contrast, 17 females, slightly more than half of the females, had empathetic statements.

Table 5: GENDER and EMPATHY $x^2 = 9.63$ $p < .01$ N = 61

N = 61

	+ Empathy	- Empathy	
MALE	5	25	30
FEMALE	17	14	31
	22	39	

Taken together the results of our study suggest a slightly more complex model of moral reasoning in children than the models offered by Gilligan or Hoffman. While we did not find clear gender differences in children's moral orientations to political conflict, we did find that female children tended to be more empathetic than male children in their narratives of the persian gulf war. Additionally, Empathy seemed more closely related to a Care orientation than the Justice orientation. This suggested to us that the roots of gender differences in adult moral reasoning are likely related to children's developing abilities to feel empathy for others. Male children, unlike females seem less inclined to feel empathy towards those involved in some conflict and --consequently --divergent, gender related modes of moral orientations develop along separate pathways.

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